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Luck

Leslie woke up with a start, her work cell phone screaming at her in the early dawn. She blearily looked at the clock, 3:07AM it read. While others might roll over and go back to sleep, Leslie had one of those jobs where not answering her cell could lead to someone's death. She had been born with the rare personality trait that compelled her to run towards the fire while everyone else ran away from it, which made for an interesting work week normally.

She quietly out of bed, careful not to disturb Jack or the children. Purposefully avoiding the squeaky floorboards, she grabbed her jump back and eased out the front door. The minute that door closed, she was off! She jogged to the elevator, quickly threw on her helmet while heading to the parking garage, tightened the straps of her backpack the minute the door opened, she jammed to the left, hopped onto her motorcycle, and roared out of the garage.

Leslie deftly zipped through traffic, knowing what was an acceptable risk and when to be cautious. She had not lived this long in her line of work without being very picky about when she used her Luck. Finally, she arrived at the station, the armored vehicle already pulled out of the bay. Clearly they were waiting on her. She rode her bike in the station, left the keys in the ignition so someone else could move it, and took her helmet off.

"Let's go Les," Brian shouted at her from the truck. "Your gear's already in, hurry up!"

She quickly climbed inside ready to get to the scene and learn more. When she got dispatched to these types of calls, she habitually checked her Luck. As always, Leslie relaxed once she saw her bar.

78%.

At 43, 78% was something to be envied, as a bomb tech, 78% was practically unheard of, especially at her age. As a teen, Leslie had read a poem by Jean de La Fontaine and a line had stayed with her, "In short, Luck's always to blame." That had always stuck in her head, it was the driving force that kept her from using it without dire need. She had seen others waste their Luck before 25, and she was determined to die with Luck left over. Of course Luck had to be used from time to time. She thought back to when Kara was born, lying there cold and blue until

a push of Luck had turned her bright pink and screaming, or the time it came down to a straight 50/50 chance on which wire to cut for a bomb to diffuse. Some Luck and a quick prayer later, the bomb had been neutralized with no casualties.

Apparently it had not always been this way, according to some, Luck was formerly not tracked or measured. Some people had more than others and they blindly lived their lives not knowing if they were going to be lucky when needed. Leslie tried to imagine how that would be...

Bam!

The bump quickly brought Leslie out of her own head and into the present. She looked out the window as she saw them pulling up to the scene. Climbing out of the truck she could smell the fear. Everyone was running around, yelling into their radios and clearly wanting to be anywhere but here. She walked into the incident tent, Captain Phillips was in command.

He looked at her and Brian and nodded acknowledgement.

“Alright guys, here is what we know so far, a domestic terrorist group has called in a bomb threat. They stated that there are multiple bombs located along the natural gas pipe lines under the city. They also stated that they had been configured in such a way that the chain reaction would wreak havoc across the entire city.” He took a shaky breath before continuing. “As of right now, the gas company is saying that if this is indeed a true threat, this could kill over 150,000 people. We have also been instructed that if word of the threat is made public or it appears there is an evacuation, they will detonate early.”

Leslie’s heart was racing as was her mind. *150,000 people?* Her brain flicked to her family asleep in their beds but thank goodness the apartment high rise was newer and all electric. She turned her attention back to Captain Phillips just as Brian was asking him what their next move was.

“First, we have identified what we believe is the main bomb, and while we cannot be certain, it looks like diffusing this one could shut down all the others.” Captain Phillips took a deep breath before delivering the next part. “Now, I know how you guys are about your Luck and how important it is. I have already been authorized to tell you that if are willing to use all but

10% of your Luck to help make this a success, we will retire you early with full benefits and salary for life as well as a bonus that reflects the percentage used.”

Leslie sat back, retirement? She would be able to be at home to watch her girls grow up, the only question she had was if 10% was enough? She was 43 and outside of using Luck for work, she had yet to barely use 10% in her lifetime. Yes, she decided, she could provide the luck that was needed. She looks at Brian and could see his worry. At 31 he had already used over 60% of his Luck, some on the job and some for personal gain. She had never been one to judge how a person spent their Luck, but she could see he was wrestling with this decision.

“Hey Bri... I got this,” she quietly said. She could see the weight fall off his shoulders. “I mean, what’s the point in holding on to it if the entire city goes, ya know?” she said light heartedly, not wanting him to stress about it. “Heck, if 68% is not enough to save the city, I don’t know what else is. I mean, that dude down in Bolivia got everyone to think he was God for under 50%.”

She went over to Captain Phillips and let him know she would provide the luck. He took a big sigh of relief and sat her down to quickly sign the agreement to the terms he had mentioned. As soon as that was done, she got suited up; just because Luck was in play did not mean she could afford to be careless. She and Brian walked down the stairs into the underground maintenance corridor. After about 200 yards, she could see it, a mess of wires and canisters all together looking like a child's art project. Taking it in, she could already see landmarks for booby traps and other pitfalls that a less experienced tech might not see.

“Ok Brian, let’s go nice and slow.” She had already started the flow of Luck before she came down the stairs. She checked now, 73%. As they started working, removing pieces and tagging wires, she started to sweat.

61%.

At 2 hours was starting to get tired, working on only about 3 hours of sleep, even adrenaline was not enough at this point. "AAgh!" Brian screamed as he ducked, Les quickly surveyed and saw the end of a wire dangling, pulled out carelessly. She checked her luck,

48%.

They kept going, driving by sheer willpower and terror.

36% ... 27% ... 18%

It got to that point, the point where reason, knowledge and experience can no longer guide you, where you gut check. You pray, bargain, and hope you make the right call...

clip...

11%

Leslie puked, sank to her knees, and fell against the wall. She heard Brian calling the “All Clear” and saw blurs coming closer in her vision. She groggily came around outside in the tent just as the light was coming up. She looked at Captain Phillips and instinctually knew something was still wrong. She caught his attention and he headed over to her.

“Hey Les, good job, you got it diffused,” he said.

“But ...?” Leslie questioned.

“But not all the bombs were connected apparently. A few went off sporadically throughout the city. It’s not as bad as it could have been but here and there, streets, businesses and homes have sustained major damaged. It's not your fault though, you saved thousands tonight,” he said, she could see how much he stressed the good she had done.

Tired and ready to see her family, she headed to her motorcycle. If she was lucky, she could catch everyone at breakfast before they left for work and school. Phillips had instructed her to take a couple days off while they figured out her retirement. On the way home she could see smoke in the distance. As she got closer to her neighborhood, the smoke grew darker and she could not see her high rise. She pulled off the road, fighting to stay calm and breathe. *Oh god*, she thought, *let it be a mistake, it has to be my eyes because I'm exhausted*. She got back on to her bike, racing to get home, as she got close she could see the fire trucks, police cars and a single ambulance. She pulled up to a stop and raced to the scene, *let it be enough* she breathed as she watched her Luck go from 11% to 0%.

It was not enough.